

THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

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Dr. Joshua Lederberg
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New York, NY 10021-6399
Via Fax: 212-327-8651

Dear Josh:

I am writing to you in your capacity as the chair of the Advisory Board to the PubMed Central effort at the National Library of Medicine. As the debate continues about free access to the scientific literature on-line, I find it embarrassing to see so little progress on the PubMed Central site. Not only is *PNAS* still the source of the vast majority of the papers on this web site, but the site itself is neither user-friendly nor particularly useful. Most remarkably, as far as I can discern, there is no way to search it! And yet, one of the major arguments that I used to convince the NAS Council to proceed with this experiment was the one originally emphasized by the National Library of Medicine: compiling our articles in a single repository makes possible full-text searching across multiple journals, thereby providing more powerful access to published information than a PubMed search itself can provide. Recently, I have been using PubMed extensively in preparing the fourth edition of *The Molecular Biology of the Cell*. Despite the "Free on PubMed Central" button next to *PNAS* papers, I always choose to access the full-text papers at HighWire Press rather than PubMed Central, because the HighWire site offers more options (e.g., citation manager, links to ISI, and alerting services), and there is nothing adding any special value at the PubMed Central site to compensate.

I am especially puzzled to note the current insistence of the "Public Library of Science" effort on not only making back issues of electronic journals free (which I of course strongly support), but also absolutely requiring that they be deposited in PubMed Central (or an equivalent public site). Unless PubMed Central can demonstrate that there is a real advantage to full-text searching on the site, this added demand has the appearance of unsupported dogma that weakens the free on-line effort that I and many others have been promoting.

The NAS Council will be conducting their annual evaluation of whether *PNAS* should continue our experimental participation in PubMed Central early this fall, and I would strongly urge your advisory board to make sure that features are added that make the site uniquely useful. This would also seem to be essential for increasing the attractiveness of the site for other high-impact journals, which is something that my Council is also likely to focus on.

PubMed Central has made a great contribution to science by beginning the (now inexorable) pressure to make access to the scientific literature barrier-free. The Academy, and I personally, continue to be committed to this effort, and look forward to seeing PubMed Central grow. But as more journals make their content free on-line elsewhere, the ball is in PubMed Central's court to demonstrate that there really is an advantage to a single central electronic repository.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce". The signature is stylized with a large, looped 'B' and a cursive 'r'.

Bruce Alberts
President

cc: Nick Cozzarelli
Ken Fulton
David Lipman